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SOCIALIZING THE STUDY OF HISTORY

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A most encouraging sign of better teaching methods is the ever-increasing demand that instruction be vitalized—that subject-matter consist only of what can actually function in the child's life, and that the method of presentation make the child appreciate the close and vital connection between his studies and real life. In general, this demand is being met by socializing the subject-matter and adapting it to the child's interests, and by the "problem" type of presentation. Thus, with reference to the organization of the history course, the Committee on Social Studies of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Education Association recommends in its report:

1. The adoption to the fullest extent possible of a "topical" method, or a "problem" method, as opposed to a method based on chronological sequence alone.
2. The selection of topics or problems for study with reference to: (a) the pupil's own immediate interest; (b) general social significance.¹

The history-methods course developed during the past two years at the Nevada State Normal School is based upon these principles. A presentation of the general method we have followed is here given to suggest one method of applying these principles and to indicate what we are doing toward improving the situation that the Committee mentions, that "probably the greatest obstacle to the vitalization of the social studies is the lack of preparation on the part of teachers . . . in part a lack of training in the facts and laws of social life as formulated in history . . . particularly

¹"Report of the Committee on Social Studies of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Education Association," *Bureau of Education Bulletin*, 1916, No. 28, p. 37.

true in the elementary schools and in rural schools.”¹ It is the hope that our history-methods course will result in giving the state’s elementary teachers a thorough acquaintance with the most important social conditions today and in teaching them the need and method of socializing the history material.

The fundamental principle that has determined the general content of the course and the methods to be advocated is based upon the aim of education as adjustment to the social environment, more commonly stated as social efficiency. With the emphasis upon efficiency in a *present* world, the chronological method as ordinarily handled was abandoned from the first as failing in any real way to make the child’s environment more intelligible to him. For, if history is to be of value as an educational means to adjustment by explaining and interpreting the present, the starting-point certainly ought to be a presentation of the thing to be explained and not the explanation as in the chronological method; the problem ought to precede the solution. What seemed to be a more rational and effective method was therefore adopted: first, a thorough consideration of that element of the environment which our historical study is to interpret, as that element exists today; and then the history of that element, or the story of how it has come to be. Since by this plan only those historical events are studied which contribute to the interpretation of the element under discussion, the method is topical. The topics possible will be suggested by the elements into which we may analyze our environment. One such analysis is presented at the close of this article.

This social environment, as we have used the term, is considered to consist no less of principles, theories, and laws than it does of concrete institutions and organizations, or specific social activities and achievements. Pre-eminently it must be emphasized as the product of a social group drawn together by common aims and organized for the accomplishment of specific purposes. Our analysis of this environment emphasizes three important elements as constituting much of the world about us: the element occasioned by society’s effort to protect itself; the element produced by man’s natural desire to prosper and to make his life more enjoyable; and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

the element represented by society's organization or government for accomplishing its purposes. The policeman or the soldier, the fire department, the work of the street-cleaning department, quarantine regulations, the labor permit for the boy of fourteen, compulsory school attendance—all of these are manifestations of society's effort to protect itself; with all of them the child comes early and constantly in contact. So, too, painting, music, literature, parks and playgrounds, all the occupations of man, and all his philanthropic and religious expressions are evidences of our desire to make life more worth the living. And election days and voting, political parties and political propaganda, public officers and public buildings, indicate the existence of society's organization or government. These are large and comprehensive aspects of our environment; they touch every boy and girl intimately and continuously and are, it is felt, of real interest to the child. They furnish, consequently, excellent topics for study.

Since any of these aspects may become the starting-point for our historical consideration, it is evident that topics for discussion will deal, not only with the political events in the nation's development, but with all matters touching the people's needs and desires: economic and industrial, religious, aesthetic, etc. In addition, then, to the topics which are concerned with the acts of the established government and which constitute a large part of many history texts, such questions may be taken up as, for example: crime and its treatment, disease and medical progress, agricultural methods and inventions, American art, the development of the modern newspaper, and the conveniences of the modern home.

To illustrate the method used, we may consider the manufacturing industry—a very large and important factor in our present-day life. As indicated above, a study is first made of the industry as it exists today. This involves any number of economic and social problems, though certainly among the questions to be considered are: the importance and extent of manufacturing in the United States today, the factory system with its division of labor and standardized product, trusts and the large corporate control of industry, labor unions, and the relation of manufactures to city life and city-life problems. The government's relation to manu-

facturing through the tariff, the work of the Department of Labor, the most important laws concerning the hours of labor, factory conditions, etc., and the many ways in which manufactures are being regulated through Congressional control of interstate commerce may well be studied in the same connection. After gaining a fairly thorough conception of that phase of our present environment which is determined by manufacturing, we turn for the purpose of comparison to a previous period in history characterized by a wholly different system of manufacturing. Such a period in American history is the Colonial. Here we have a population almost wholly agricultural, with manufacturing but one phase of the farmer's life; we note the absence of the factory and power-driven machinery, of the corporation and the capitalist, of the labor union, and of the modern type of city.

A great value of such a comparison is to bring home forcibly to the student the fact that these various elements of his environment, which he has always taken as a matter of course, are, after all, unusual and noteworthy. It is to be hoped, too, that now the problem will arise naturally of asking, since the present differs so radically from the past, how this great change has been brought about. The history study may now follow as an answer to a problem consciously felt.

This history study is chronological. Beginning with the Colonial days, we take up the various events which mark the development of manufacturing industry: the invention of the spinning and weaving machinery (which, it must be pointed out, is not an American but a European achievement), its introduction into America, the effect of the War of 1812 upon manufacture in the United States, the growth of factories with their long hours of labor and unhealthful conditions in the mill towns of New England, the invention of the steam engine, the protective tariff, the rise of labor organizations, the growth of the trusts, the increase and change of character of immigration after 1880 and the settlement of foreigners in the big cities, the Sherman anti-trust law, the interstate-commerce law, the creation of the Department of Commerce and Labor, and the enactment of laws and important court decisions affecting labor. Other related topics may be included. Extensive

treatment of all those mentioned may not be desirable; some may be omitted altogether, especially if they can be included under other topics.

Beginning as we do with the present world, our topics will naturally be selected for their social significance. Whether, in addition, they will appeal to the pupils' own immediate interests, will, of course, depend upon the pupils and the method of approach. There are, it is true, in any one of the aspects of the environment which we have indicated, many things which are technical or specialized and beyond the interests of children. But, if we devote our study to the larger elements only, we should have topics that do interest them because they are such a common and comprehensive part of the child's life.

Besides meeting the general principles recommended by the Committee on Social Studies, the method described has two advantages worth mentioning. In the first place, we have a criterion for judging the relative value of the large number of events discussed in the history text and the amount of attention any event may deserve. In the light of the large topic selected for treatment, and in answer to the problem of how our present situation has grown out of a past, we shall decide upon those historical events as most important which have had the most direct influence upon the present. The importance that is to be attached to the treason of Aaron Burr, to the Whiskey Rebellion, or to the Virginia Charter of 1619, will depend upon the extent to which some phase of our life now is determined by the event in question.

Another value of this method lies in the opportunity offered for emphasizing the price that past society has paid for the progress we enjoy. The better labor conditions of today, the gradual elimination of bad tenements and sweatshops, the wonderful mechanical inventions for simplifying toil, all the privileges and comforts of our modern life, have been bought by the devotion and sacrifices of individuals and organizations, in spite of hardship, persecution, and the constant opposition of sinister forces. A realization that progress is always made in just this way and that it is our obligation to continue this progress for the future ought to be a most potent factor in making history function for better citizenship.

The following outline presents in some detail the analysis we have made for suggesting the topics that might prove satisfactory for historical treatment by the method described. Its value lies probably more in its suggestiveness than in its completeness.

- A. The element of our environment arising from society's effort to protect itself.
 - I. Protection against foreign aggression.
 - 1. By peaceful representation: ambassadors and treaties.
 - 2. By promulgating specific foreign policies and doctrines.
 - 3. By the maintenance of an army, navy, militia, etc.
 - II. Protection against dangerous persons.
 - 1. Criminals and delinquents through the police, courts, and prisons.
 - 2. The insane and feeble-minded by confinement in special institutions.
 - III. Protection against disease and physical degeneration.
 - 1. Through health officers, quarantine regulations, sewage and garbage disposal, street-cleaning departments, provisions for medical schools, control of medical practice, provision for pure water and food supply, playgrounds, etc.
 - 2. In the occupations, through laws regulating the hours of labor, especially for women and children, providing healthful conditions of work, requiring safety appliances, etc.
 - IV. Protection against ignorance.
 - 1. Through a public-school system and compulsory education.
 - 2. Through libraries and museums.
- B. The element of our environment produced by the desire for personal welfare and for making life more enjoyable.
 - I. The element growing out of the occupations of the people.
 - 1. Agriculture.
 - a) Extent and importance of the industry; present methods of farming; problems of rural life.
 - b) The federal government and agriculture.
 - (1) Attempts of the farming class to get aid through political influence.
 - (2) The Department of Agriculture.
 - (3) The government's land policy.
 - (a) The Homestead law.
 - (b) The reclamation policy.
 - (4) Aid for agricultural education.
 - (a) Morrill Land-Grant act.
 - (b) Smith-Lever act.
 - (5) The Federal Farm-Loan act.

2. Commerce and trade.
 - a) Nature and importance of the industry; complex system by which trade is carried on.
 - (1) Means and methods of transportation.
 - (2) Banks and the system of exchange.
 - b) The federal government and commerce.
 - (1) Government aid for transportation.
 - (a) Appropriations for better roads.
 - (b) Land-grants to railroads.
 - (c) Improvement of waterways and building of canals.
 - (2) Government and currency.
 - (a) Coinage and money legislation.
 - (b) Banks and banking acts.
 - (3) Control of interstate commerce.
 - (a) Interstate-Commerce law.
 - (4) Consuls and consular reports.
 - (5) Department of Commerce.
 3. Manufacturing.
 - a) The factory system of manufacture.
 - (1) Large corporation control of industry.
 - (2) Factory life and problems.
 - (3) Labor unions.
 - (4) Effect on city development and city problems.
 - b) The government and manufacturing.
 - (1) The protective tariff.
 - (2) Control of manufacturing through control of interstate commerce.
 - (3) Department of Labor.
 4. Other important occupations: mining, lumbering, fishing, grazing.
- II. The element occasioned by the religious nature of people.
1. Religious institutions.
 - a) Churches.
 - b) Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A.
 2. Philanthropic and social-service enterprises.
 - a) Settlement work.
 - b) Red Cross.
 - c) Hospitals and dispensaries.
 3. Important religious principles.
 - a) Separation of church and state.
 - b) Freedom of worship.
 4. Philanthropic provisions by organized society.
 - a) Poor farms, orphan homes, etc.

- III. The element arising from the people's desire for pleasure, enjoyment, and comfort.
 - 1. Fine arts: painting, music, sculpture, architecture.
 - 2. Literature and newspapers.
 - a) Collection and dissemination of news.
 - b) Printing and bookbinding.
 - 3. Conveniences and comforts of home life.
 - a) Home furnishings and adornments.
 - b) Appliances for heating and lighting.
 - 4. Travel.
 - 5. Organized society and the people's welfare.
 - a) Parks and playgrounds.
 - b) Libraries and museums.
 - c) The postal system.
- C. The element determined by society's organization (government) for accomplishing its desires.
 - I. The national organization: a federal union.
 - 1. The individual states: a government within a government.
 - a) Power of the states v. that of the Union.
 - 2. The Union.
 - a) Administrative and executive departments.
 - b) Legislative department.
 - c) Judicial department.
 - II. The great political principle on which the organization is founded: democracy—government of, by, for, the people.
 - 1. The right of suffrage.
 - 2. All officers of the government responsible to the people.
 - III. Political parties and party government.